## GUIDE TO THE SS16 PEMON FILE

[The Pemon constitute an ethnolinguistic unit composed of several subgroups including the Taulipang (Arecuna), Camaracoto (Kamarakoto) -- the file sample, and the Teweya, all of the Cariban linguistic stock. The Pemon are located in the Gran Sabana area of south and southeastern Venezuela, roughly between 4° 34' and 6° 45' North latitude and 60° 34' and 62° 50' West longitude.

As noted, all the sub-groups of Pemon speak Cariban which is further differentiated into several distinct languages and many local dialects. Kamarakoto and Taurepan are both dialects of the Arekuna language, which in turn is a somewhat archaic form of Carib.

There is very little information available on the population of this group. When Aremellada worked with the Pemon as a missionary (1933-1945), the estimate he gave was 2,500 individuals. In 1939, Simpson, working with the Kamarakoto, estimated their number as about 250 (5: Simpson, p. 110).

Slash and burn agriculture was the primary subsistence pattern supplemented by fishing and hunting.

Villages consisted of several round houses with conically shaped palm thatched roofs. These houses, which were occasionally built on piles, often accomodated several extended families. Each village was politically autonomous

under a headman (tusauá or captain) whose powers were relatively limited. He was succeeded in the office by his son. Among the Kamarakoto the village chief was not necessarily the oldest man in the group, but his status was determined by his own individual personality traits. There was no formal selection of the chief (to' - esa'), and his position in the group was that of a leader among equals. His opinion was valued and he was looked to for decisions and leadership in matters involving the family group as a whole. He was responsible for seeing that the basic necessities were provided for the group he represented, and if need be, towards attaining this goal, he could order the labor of others. Although generally the village chief was recognized as the ultimate political authority, among the central group of Kamarakoto there was a superior chief above the village level. This official known as teburu (or tepuru), sometimes rendered as cacique, was chosen on the basis of individual prestige rather than any hereditary principle, although it was sometimes that in actual fact. Tenure in this office was for life, and upon the death of the teburu a new official was chosen by discussion and agreement. This teburu could delegate some of his functions to a vice-cacique or sub-cacique, but the latter was not a fixed or generally recognized office.

The Kamarakoto kinship system was of the Hawaiian type (i.e., all cousins were equated with siblings or called by terms clearly derived from those of siblings), with bifurcate merging avuncular terminology. Unilinear kin groups were absent.

Among the Kamarakoto, marriages were permitted between first cousins as well as between uncles and nieces

and aunts and nephews. Simpson says that "there is thus no requirement of exogamy (even first-degree incest is not absolutely rejected on moral grounds) and there is an equal absence of obligatory endogamy, marriages with members of other tribes are uncommon, because of lack of opportunity, but do occur and are not considered abnormal or reprehensible in any way" (5: Simpson, p. 226). Marriages took place informally, generally by the mere assumption of common residence between a man and a woman. Polygyny was also common among the Pemon.

Pemon religion was relatively simple and animistically oriented. They believed in a great number of spirits, but had no specific belief in a supreme being. Shamanism, however, was well developed, with the role of shaman or piache being a very important one in the society. Generally the functions of the shaman were separate from any political or government functions among the majority of Pemon groups; however, among the Kamarakoto the shaman frequently was also a chief (to' - esa').

The SS16 Pemon file consists of four sources, three in English and one (2: Armellada) a translation from the Spanish. The primary sources in the file are 5: Simpson, dealing with the Kamarakoto sub-group of the Pemon, and 2: Armellada, which gives generalized data on the whole Pemon group. Armellada spent twelve years in the field among the Pemon while serving as a Franciscan Capuchin missionary. 3: Simpson, written by a well-known vertebrate paleontologist and comparative zoologist, is a short article on the various native terms used by the Carib-speaking tribes of Guiana and Venezuela to describe the major forms of mammal species found in the area.

Other limited linguistic material is also to be found in this source, particularly in reference to the spread and distribution of dialects of the Carib language family. 4: Armellada presents some general notes on the Pemon concept of dreams and a list of their principal kamaino, or omens. 5: Simpson, although dealing in large part with the Kamarakoto language (at least one-third of the source), also contains much information on material culture, with additional, but limited data on kinship (very brief references), marriages, division of labor, law, trade, magic, and religion.

The Pemon file is adequate for general cross-cultural purposes, but the researcher should be aware of the fact that much of the data contained herein relates to the Kamarakoto sub-group, and do not necessarily represent the Pemon as a whole. The file is relatively weak on kinship information and on social and political organization. Most of the information for the file was collected in the period of 1933-1945. The Pemon file was processed in 1966-1969.]